

Current listing of: T689:2

11/24/85 15:38 Page: 1

Slug:AM-BOMB 4THLD (WRITETHROUGH, P Date: 11/23/85 14:26:41

Category:REURI

Story:r098

GERMAN POLICE PROBE RAF LINK IN FRANKFURT CAR BOMBING

(Eds: new details throughout)

By Stephen Jukes

FRANKFURT, West Germany, Nov 24, Reuter - At least 23 people were injured today when a car bomb exploded at an American PX center packed with Christmas shoppers in an attack linked to the bombing of a U.S. air base last summer.

The blast injured 21 Americans, one seriously, and two West Germans. It was the third bomb attack in the area in four months.

The PX (Post Exchange), a shopping center for U.S. military personnel, was filled with thousands of Christmass shoppers when the bomb went off.

The blast blew in the windows and bits of glass went flying ... then people started running from all directions. There was a huge plume of smoke," said Gail Chaney, who works in a carpet shop across the street.

A spokesman for the federal prosecutor's office in Karlsruhe said there were parallels with a car bomb that killed two Americans and wounded 20 at the Rhein-Main air base near Frankfurt on August 8.

The left-wing Red Army Faction (RAF) urban guerrilla group claimed responsibility for that attack, saying it had murdered an American soldier for his identity card to gain entry to the base.

A police spokesman said no one had claimed responsibility for today's blast.

The bomb was planted in a silver metallic BMW sedan had a West German license plate AB-CH 350, which meant it came from the nearby town of Aschaffenburg.

The blast, at 3.22 P.M., (9.22 A.M. EST) blew a crater six feet wide in the ground and ripped a hole in a nearby laundromat wall.

Witnesses said about 25 cars were wrecked and windows blown out of buildings over a radius of 300 yards

The police spokesman said the car had been bought only a day earlier at a used car lot in Gravenbruch south of Frankfurt. It was at this market that the green Volkswagen Passat used in August's airbase attack was bought.

The BMW had been parked behind a gas station at the military shopping center and Chris Chalko, a spokesman for the U.S. Fifth Army Corps, said it was possible the bombers were seeking to ignite underground fuel storage tanks.

Chalko said it was not unusual for West German cars to be parked at the shopping complex. No security checks were usually made in that area, he said.

The complex, which was open Sunday specially for Christmas shopping, is the biggest in the Frankfurt area for U.S. servicemen and their families.

In addition to the Rhein Mein airbase attack, three bombs

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Current listing of: T689:2 11/24/85 15:38 Page: 2
15:38 at a U.S. base in the Saarland in September, causing
damage but no injuries.

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